

# Digital Imaginations: Rehearsing Decolonial Undocumented Labor Movements in Higher Education

Daniela Gutiérrez López, Gender Studies PhD Candidate



As an international student who is also a radical activist, am I putting my visa at risk? Will I get in trouble with the law?

## BACKGROUND

From August 2016 to December 2018, I dedicated my life to social justice organizing within Indiana University's student organization UndocuHoosiers Bloomington (UHB), in order to help secure the wellbeing of undocumented immigrants. Over the years, we fundraised for the Bloomington community. We led "Know Your Rights" workshops. We plugged into state and national advocacy for public policy reform (i.e. DACA and the DREAM Act), and attempted to create new local policy. We strived to base-build through educational programs. We participated in Movimiento Cosecha's migrant economic boycott, "A Day Without Immigrants" (2017). To this day, UHB continues to do fantastic work.

Though unplanned, these experiences became central to my doctoral research. Inspired additionally by the scholarship of Black and brown womxn like Jacqui Alexander, Sylvia Wynter, Eve Tuck, and María Lugones, they led me to ask: how does the neoliberal and imperial university system in the settler U.S. serve a globalized sociocultural-political-environmental-economic system that Others, criminalizes, and annihilates minoritized communities? In order to answer this question, part of my dissertation tracks the kinds of tactics student-activists at IUB have deployed since 45's election (2016-2018), in order to protest and dismantle this system.

## INTERTWINING MOVEMENTS

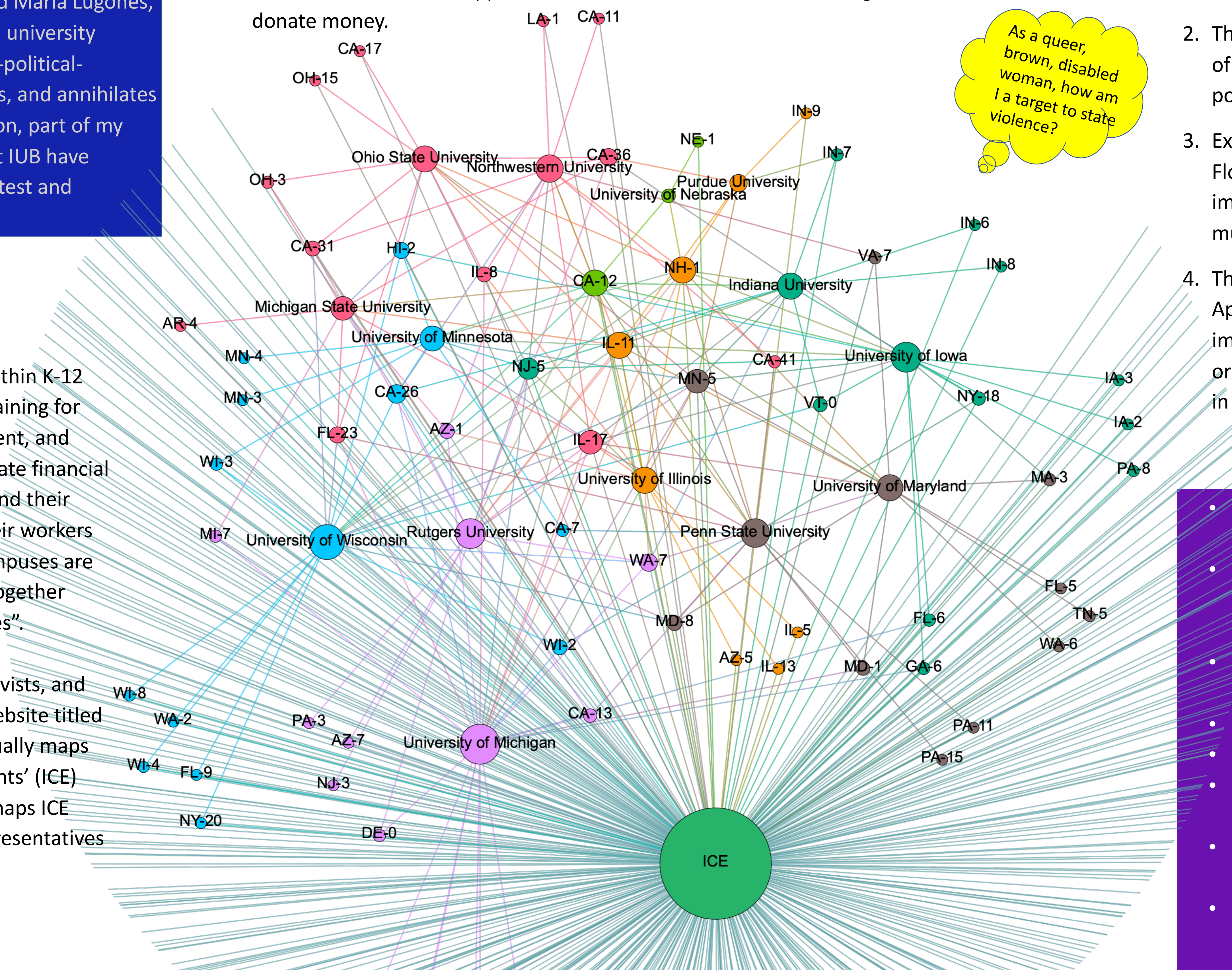
- 1. LABOR:** Across the U.S, reignited labor movements within K-12 and higher education have adopted a model of “Bargaining for the Common Good”. This means unions (faculty, student, and staff alike) may use their capacities to not only negotiate financial contracts, but also to challenge the ways employers and their investors contribute to the systemic oppression of their workers and of the larger communities in which university campuses are located. Initiatives that tackle immigration have put together materials and scripts to argue for “sanctuary campuses”.
- 2. IMMIGRATION:** Collaborations between scholars, activists, and digital creators have resulted in the creation of the website titled “Torn Apart/Separados”. Volume 1 of the website visually maps the locations of Immigration and Customs Enforcements’ (ICE) facilities across the U.S.. Volume 2 exposes and also maps ICE investments (including numbers) in U.S. congress representatives for districts in all 50 states.

**THIS PROJECT**

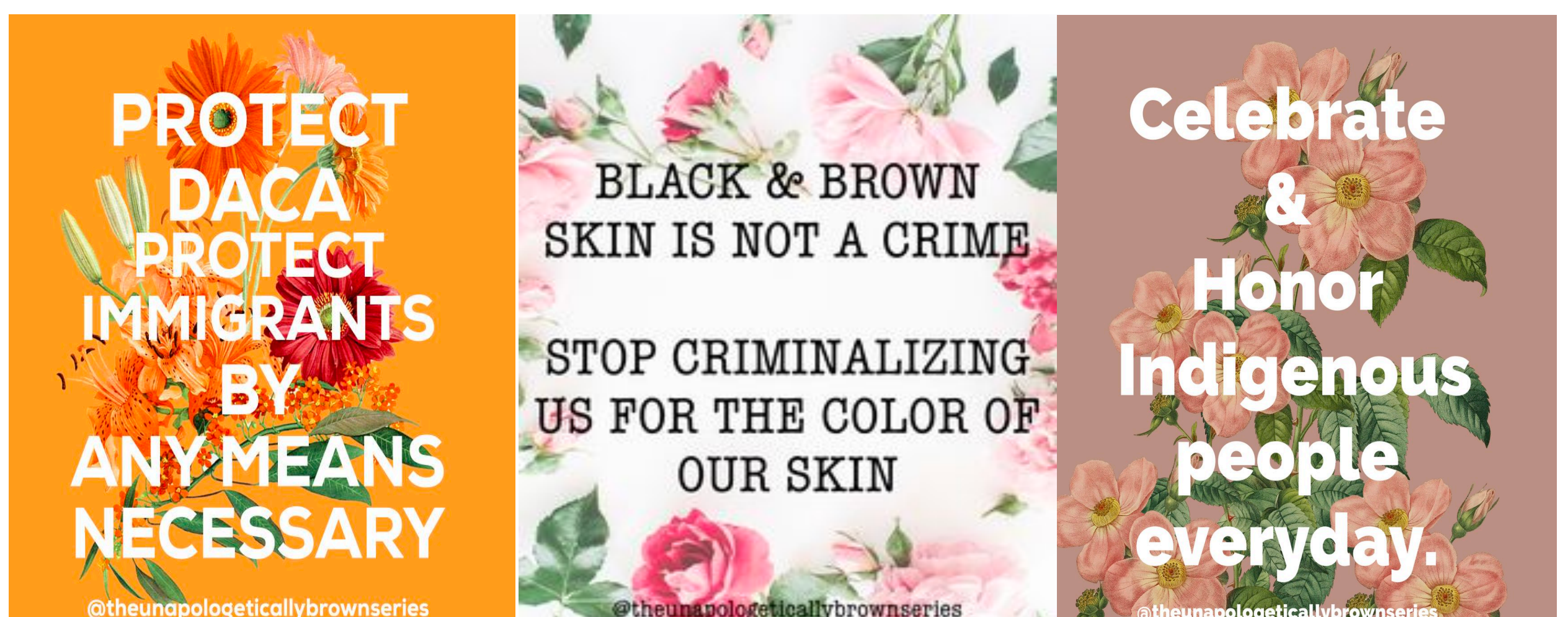
**WHAT IS IT?** It is a network graph that visually displays the interconnections, overlaps between 1) House district representatives that received money from ICE in 2016, and 2) congress-people who received money from Big 10 universities, including IU-Bloomington individuals, for their 2016 elections.

## HOW DO I READ IT?

- The **"nodes" (the circles)**, represent either ICE; Big Ten universities; or state and district number.
- The **"edges" (the lines between them)**, show an exchange of money between these institutions/places.
- The **size** of the nodes corresponds to the amount of money exchanged: the **bigger** the circle, the **more money** was donated.
- The **color clusters** indicate closer relationships between nodes.
- The lines from ICE to cropped out nodes are to districts to which Big 10 universities did not donate money.



## THOUGHTS/IMPLICATIONS



1. This project is a rehearsal of how we can use the digital humanities to construct open-source tools for activists to know what money, *whose* money to target (divest from), as they DEMAND “the good” for undocumented immigrants, IMAGINING and CREATING radical futures.
2. This was a first step towards understanding how public (local) institutions of higher education are complicit with national xenophobic discourses, policies, and institutions.
3. Examples of Big Ten universities donating money to California, Arizona, Florida, reflect how the Midwest and the Northeast may affect immigration policy at the southern border. It also means activist networks must extend in similar ways to financial networks.
4. This tool is the result of the labor and online research executed by “Torn Apart”, IDAH, and myself. The collaborative process confirmed the importance of coalition-building on and off campus for social justice organizing that attends to different, multiple ways of knowing and being in the world.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- I imagine creating a toolkit, including sources, for others to create similar visualizations
- I imagine analyses of my network graphs and speculation about how student-activists may use them to mobilize for undocumented immigrants
- I imagine tracing graphed House representatives' connections to public policy on immigration and criminalization
- I imagine at least English and Spanish versions of this platform
- I imagine bilingual audio recordings accompanying the writing
- I imagine the network graphs layered onto a map of the Américas, where the nodes are locked into their particular locations
- I imagine tracing corporate and Wall Street (private) investments in Big 10 public universities
- I imagine this being the basis of a larger scholar-activist mobilizations to #AbolishPol.ICE and forge no-border, anti-capitalist futures